



1-8-08

Real-Time Beach Conditions Report Now Available in Collier

The Beach Conditions Report, which provides the public with real-time information about the presence of red tide at area beaches, will expand later this month to include conditions at eight Collier County beaches.

The system, created in response to requests for current and up-to-date information about beach conditions from area residents, businesses and beachgoers, is designed to provide regular twice-daily updates about conditions at beaches, including the presence of red tide and whether it is affecting beachgoers. The reports are collected by lifeguards, parks personnel and other beach monitors, input on wireless handheld computers and automatically updated on the Web. A telephone update is also available for some beaches for members of the public or visitors without Internet access.

Staff with Mote Marine Laboratory will be training beach representatives in Collier on making reports this week. There will be a media opportunity at 10 a.m. Jan. 10, at the Naples Pier. Media may interview Mote staff, the beach staff receiving the training and representatives from Mote's partner agencies. The Beach Conditions Report is available to the public online at www.mote.org/beaches or by calling 941-BEACHES.

The Beach Conditions Report was created in 2006 by Dr. Barbara Kirkpatrick, manager of Mote's Environmental Health Program, working with Solutions To Avoid Red Tide (START), the Florida Department of Health and Sarasota County. The program was initially tested in Sarasota County and later expanded to the north and south. When the Collier County reports go live – Jan. 18, 2008 - the Beach Conditions Report will cover beaches along the entire Southwest Florida coast: Pinellas, Manatee, Sarasota, Lee and Collier counties.

The expansion of the Beach Conditions Report into Collier County followed a 2007 Gulf of Mexico Alliance workshop on red tide at Rookery Bay, which brought together the various agencies now involved in Collier County. "As a member of the Gulf Alliance, Rookery Bay's goal is to increase partnerships that protect water quality in the Gulf of Mexico and engage the public in a meaningful way," said Tabitha Whalen Stadler, Coastal Training Coordinator, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. "The Beach Conditions Report is an extremely valuable tool that will help lessen the impacts of red tide on our beach communities."

The expansion into Collier County is being supported by the Collier County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the cities of Marco Island and Naples, Collier County Pollution Control, the Collier County Parks and Recreation Department and the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Alltel Wireless is also providing the handheld computers at a discounted rate, in addition to providing discounted "air" time.

"Part of our mission is to inform our visitors of the current conditions on our award-winning Collier County beaches," said Jack Wert, director of Collier County's Tourism Development Council. "This new reporting system gives us the ability to report real-time conditions, which educates and informs our residents and out-of-town visitors of beach conditions and possible water quality concerns."

The Beach Conditions Report includes several types of information: whether dead fish are present, whether there is respiratory irritation among beachgoers, what the water color

is, wind direction and what flags are currently flying at the beaches (at lifeguard-monitored beaches only) and whether and where red drift algae is present. Reports are scheduled to be updated at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. daily to coincide with times of the day when people are most likely to use the beach. The system – already online for Pinellas, Manatee, Sarasota and Lee counties - is being tested in Collier this week and is expected to be available to the public Friday, Jan. 18. All of the information in the reports is date and time stamped so the public knows how recently a report was made. The information gathered for the Beach Conditions Report is also shared with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which formulates a harmful algae bloom forecast. The Beach Conditions Report should help enhance NOAA's forecast ability.

About Mote Marine Laboratory

Founded in 1955, Mote Marine Laboratory is an independent, nonprofit marine research organization. It is dedicated to advancing the science of the sea through the study of marine and estuarine ecosystems, through the public Mote Aquarium and through an education division that provides unique programs for all ages.